

DeLoach Vineyards

Doing DeLoach: The rebirth of a California winery.

By [Ted Scheffler](#)

Wine lovers visiting [DeLoach Vineyards](#) in Sonoma's Russian River Valley are greeted by a beautiful, modern, 18-foot bronze sculpture called "Earth and Sky," created by artist Peter Schifrin. According to the artist, it celebrates "the human spirit in its relationship to the Earth and its celestial skies." He continues, "DeLoach Vineyards is committed to biodynamic agriculture which embraces a spiritual, organic and scientific relationship with farming. It nourishes and heals the Earth. My sculpture is created as a symbol honoring that effort." The sculpture, in addition to ushering visitors into DeLoach, also signals, in a way, the rebirth of the winery—a winery that was all but dead less than a decade ago.

What Michael DeLoach calls a "perfect storm" of unfavorable business and financial decisions, along with a wine glut and record low grape prices, contributed to the winery's 2003 descent into bankruptcy. Enter winemaker (and moneybags) Jean-Claude Boisset, the second-largest exporter and third-biggest producer of wine in France. Late in 2003, Boisset Family Estates purchased DeLoach Vineyards and proceeded to rip out all of the existing vines and start from scratch, planting primarily Burgundian varietals such as Pinot Noir and Chardonnay and seriously trimming production levels, improving quality and expanding its single-vineyard program. In addition, the estate vineyards were converted to an organic and biodynamic farming regimen, and received organic certification in 2008. It's quite a comeback story, and the new wines demonstrate Boisset's tenacity: In 2006, a DeLoach Pinot Noir won top honors as *Wine Spectator's* No. 1 Wine of the Year.



The Russian River Valley is well suited for growing Burgundian grapes; in particular, DeLoach's Chardonnays and Pinot Noirs are true to the French style. Boisset—who has vineyards in the Cote de Nuits part of Northern Burgundy (Le Musigny, Charmes-Chambertin, Clos du Prieure, Les Bonnes Mares and Clos de Vougeot and others)—knows his way around Burgundian varietals. Recently, I had the opportunity to taste a wide range of DeLoach Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Zinfandel at the winery, and I left mightily impressed.

DeLoach's California Heritage Reserve series represents the company's entry-level wines, selling here for about \$13-\$14 (and frequently on sale for less). But don't let the low price dissuade you; there's a lot to love about these economical wines, which make up about 60 percent of DeLoach's overall production. A little farther up the price spectrum is DeLoach O.F.S. (Our Finest Selection), hand-made with loving care. For the 2007 O.F.S. Chardonnay (\$32), the juice is allowed settle first in stainless steel barrels before being racked into French oak, then the wine is aged *sur lies* for nine months. The result is an elegant Chardonnay with tropical aromas, pretty floral notes and surprising balance and length for a wine just over \$30. Not quite as complex, but still very satisfying for the price, is DeLoach's mid-range, fruit-forward Chardonnay: 2007 Russian River Valley (\$16.95).

Moving through the DeLoach Pinots, I was struck by how "Frenchy" they tasted. The 2007 Russian River Valley Pinot Noir (\$16), in particular, was lovely, which is also why it's difficult to find. Ripe raspberry, rhubarb and strawberry aromas entice the wine drinker to indulge in this medium-tannic, slightly spicy brew of rich black cherries and good acidity. I'd love to take this Pinot out for a spin with a grilled leg of lamb from the barbecue.

And, here's one more DeLoach offering you should try to get your hands on: Forgotten Vines Zinfandel 2007 (\$36). I tasted this wine near the end of a lengthy wine tasting and, although my taste buds were screaming for a rest, it revived them with its strikingly vibrant cherry and cranberry fruit flavors, soft tannins and long finish.